

A Simple Guide to Surviving the Seaside

2021 is set to be a year of new and under-explored relationships between the outer and inner worlds, so we need to reconsider the basics of life on the Brexit archipelago.

By Bobby K

Unlike any one person, Great Britain is an island. Within the cultures of the British peoples there are broadly two competing perspectives on that island-nature and how we see the waters surrounding our land.

One understands the bounding ocean, seas and channel as a porous membrane: A means of concourse and exchange, a medium for the mutual transmission of ideas, energies, animals, peoples and products. The seas around Britain open us to the world, and it to us.

It is how new information enters the otherwise closed system of the island, without which entropy and collapse are inevitable.

The other, long-standing and entrenched viewpoint - artificial, largely ahistorical but nevertheless real and substantive - is that the sea is a barrier-moat, a fortress built by Nature for herself, a wet iron wall keeping the hated Johnathan Quintessence Foreigner away from our land.

There have even been a handful of times — most recently the early 1940s — when this perspective was important for national, even global survival.

Despite the wishes of many reading this now, it is clear which of these perspectives is currently dominant among Britain's populace and power centres. The apparently critical contention point of fishing in the last

minute Brexit deal negotiations at the end of 2020 were a case in point. This tiny UK industry's legislative significance isn't about protecting jobs or even food supplies. 'Fisheries' and related terms are code for the legal right to project force in shared waters.

It's about Britain's decision to intentionally transform our once flowing, membranous exchange routes into a sharpened ring of steel.

Or in the words of *UK Maritime Power*, published by the MOD's Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, 'the ability to apply maritime military capabilities at and from the sea to influence the behaviour of actors and the course of events.'

This is the high-tech, high-impact, oceanic magic of international statecraft. During the first lockdown of spring 2020, grey navy vessels were visible along the Narrow Sea, hulking on the horizon of innocuous holiday towns who never saw such sentries before.

Sinking refugee dinghies and sprinkling the odd human sacrifice into the hungry old water is only part of the operation. The wider purpose is to darken, destabilise and remilitarise the sea *as such*.

'Britain as Maritime Power' is one of the few reactionary myths that hasn't yet been mobilised in service of our ongoing soft civil war, so needs a credible focus for the state's next phase of jingoism, flag-shagging and xeno-terror. The recent teacup-storm

around the singing of *Rule Britannia* should be seen as what it is: a clear signal of our new feudal masters' intent.

To put it in more solid terms, the British Navy recently floated the two largest warships in its long bloody history. Our famously aircraft-less aircraft carriers, built as an outsourced weapons platforms for high-bidding private contractors and Atlanticist defense postures. A century of offshore warfare and shipping lane police actions is one Her Majesty's government has actively invested tens of billions in since before the millennium.

A mercenary nation, hiding in its island fortress. It's not a pretty future. It hasn't been a pretty past.

(Many feel instinctively threatened by this new abnormal, knowing that once the outer-Other is successfully managed, the sadistic attentions of the victor class must inevitably turn to the inner-Other. And that the soft civil war is not so soft for those already suffering from a hard decade of austerity, alienation and plague.)

Britain's seaside towns - not its deep harbours, hidden coves, high chalk cliffs or automated container terminals - are where the geographical imperatives and abstract chemistries of the seas meet the many small facts of everyday life.

The land has its tides and currents too. The seaside is where our lost people wash up like so much flotsam, pushed

to the edges by society's disdain till there is nowhere else to go. The Redcars and Jaywicks, Cleethorpes and Scarboroughs are the island's literal margins - spaces where only neglect and deprivation flourish best.

These sites of contention are the pressure points that nurtured the petty resentments which brought us to this moment. And they are where we can start again, to transform the sea's closed frontier back into an open expanse of possibility.

It takes continual investments of human capital - cash, hope, light, laughter - for these towns on the borderland to face down the spirits of the void. It's hard to know where these investments will come from. Unless we make them ourselves.

In the short term, the large-scale, national magics currently abroad can be undone, by the law of inversion, through small and personal acts of reinvention and reckoning. We need both ritual strategies for individually surviving the newly hostile Neptunian border; and for working through our new forms of national, domestic and digital isolation to develop community support squads, mutual aid gangs and interstitial infrastructure for building an island we all wish to stay afloat on.

A guide to seaside survival

Here are five easy exercises that can deepen your relationship with shoreline life. This is not sea magic or earth magic, but something in-between and neither. A couple of these

praxes are not entirely risk free, so be sure to check tide times, temperature and turbulence before dipping your toe in.

Remember mighty Poseidon makes pets of Cthulhu and Leviathan alike, and the border of his dominion should not be crossed lightly. It's never a bad idea to throw him a skinful of dark wine for thanks and protection.

1. Sea-breathing

This is a simple, powerful form of breathwork which avoids all human systems of counting and control, putting your blood and body at the questionable mercy of the elemental forces.

Go to the beach. Stand close to the shoreline (or maybe sitting is safer, as this exercise can make you dizzy). Breathe in through the nose when the foam crawls back towards the sea, and breathe out through the mouth when the wave crests over inward. Let your body decide which waves to choose.

It shouldn't take long doing this before you feel thoroughly inhuman and amphibian. You may notice your exhalations are making their own drifts of foaming spittle about your lips, so wipe them off before you return where people are. This method works well at the start and end of Stephen's constitutional (see below).

2. Cnut's method

At low or low-ish tide, place a chair halfway up the beach. Then, as Arthur

Fonzerelli would say: sit on it. And stay there. For as long as it takes.

For added drama, if you wish, tell the sea to turn back as it gets closer. But you're not here to learn a lesson about the limits of kingly power. You're here to sit with the fear of losing ground, with the pain of transformation from a terrestrial to an aquatic organism. You're here to notice the resonance between the rush of the tide upon the land and that panic rushing up your spine as the first foam laps about your heels and chairlegs.

Decide for yourself the best time to abandon throne, but do it before someone calls the coastguard. Use a cheap wooden chair and let it go. Watch it disappear from up-shore, or until the light fails.

3. Cuthbert's method

This more long-term project involves standing at a set place midway between the high- and low-tide lines and saying your daily charms, chants, prayers and invocations. Pick a high lateral topos, to your left or right, to be your earth anchor and remain in the right spot, as the sea and shoreline change about you day by day. On some days you will be dry, on some days wet to your ankles, your waist, or your neck. Cold and adrenaline fervour will rise in you accordingly, and you will know throughout your entire body the depth of change enacted on the land by the spirits of the sea. As the liquid weight throws itself onto the land, you will be its lens, informing and influencing its intent.

A one-off approach to this method is to wade out into the sea to your waist, your neck, or just until you are further out than any other human, and say your peace there. A good standby invocation for these occasions are these lines, adapted from Kate McIlhagga, late of the Iona community:

*We would become your
Cuthbert people,
O Lord of the Sea, shepherds of your
sheep,
peace makers and hospitality givers
open to change and partnership,
Spirit
led, in solitude and celebration and
service.²*

4. Stephen's constitutional

Named in honour of James Joyce's proto-goth existentialist, this method - taking a stroll along the beach - challenges weird-walker orthodoxy in its pursuit of the meanings inherent to linearity and repetition. Walk along the seafront a while, turn on your heel, and walk back to where you came. Look left, look right, and look ahead.

To distract the conscious mind as you go, chew a few choice lines from *Ulysses* chapter 3:

*Airs romped around him, nipping and
eager airs. They are coming,
waves. The whitemaned seahorses,
champing, brightwindbridled, the
steeds of Mananaan.³*

The understanding here is one of acknowledging change-in-sameness, and the impossibility of locating the exact moment when one thing becomes another. In the short time since you stepped here last, the sea's height will have changed, the sun or moon will have moved. What only existed in potentia when you went there last, will have become form. You are in a different world now.

In that evanescent stretch, while you faced the other way, Proteus became manifest and visible, changing the world about his person. And you were there to witness it.

Almost.

5. The lamentation of Judy

Find a seaside Punch and Judy Show, and watch it. If you can't find one near you - though they are not as rare as you imagine - download a video and take it to the sea yourself.

There's a good reason this supernatural kitchen sink horror show is so frequently performed along the coastline. Disguised as a children's entertainment, its true audience are the thousands of sea spirits washed-up on to the land every day.

Like a public information film from the 1970s, it's a terrifying warning of the dangers of life-on-land: all the laws, chaos, loss, strife, pain and pettiness that are intrinsic to earthbound existence. Few sea spirits, whether inorganic, elemental, ghostly

or aquatic, are truly prepared for the curt ferocity of life as a human animal.

Its message to the sea is *'You think it's harsh where you are. But you are not ready for this madness. Best stay away.'*

Whenever the ocean glowers and threatens, wait for the tide to ebb and send it on its way with Mr. Punch's sinister, well known curse: *'That's the way to do it.'*

Britain's island-nature makes us all sea creatures. Every human is already amphibian: breathing simultaneously in the twin spheres of matter and spirit. Islanders and seashiders are doubly so - defined again by both land and sea. We are walking droplets of salt and water sent up onto the land,

and each of us contains oceans more inside. The waters surrounding our island are undergoing a historically rare moment, turning cold and distant in the spirit even as they warm and rise in the material. Reopening the seas to share our lives with the worlds beyond is a process we each have to work at.

Because as the water becomes a wall, we are not trapped in here with the forces of fear, reaction and the cruel gods of ancient earths. They are trapped in here with us. In good time and with good tactics, we will wash them all away.

1. From Ministry of Defence Joint Doctrine Publication O-10 UK Maritime Power, Fifth Edition. Full text at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/662000/doctrine_uk_maritime_power_jdp_o_10.pdf

2. Adapted from a prayer sourced via <https://www.stcuthbertsway.net/pilgrim%20prayers.pdf>

3. You can find the full text of *Ulysses* chapter 3 online at http://online-literature.com/james_joyce/ulysses/3

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